



Department of
Education

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Learning About **Diwali**





Why Do We Study Different Cultures?

As our city becomes more and more diverse, the likelihood of interacting with people of other cultures is very high. Because of this, it is increasingly important that we learn to respect and show empathy toward other cultures and to understand their beliefs and ways of doing things.

Appreciation of other cultures requires nurturing our sense of tolerance and acceptance. The more we understand and appreciate each other, the more we strengthen the social fabric of our city and our schools.



Connection to NYC Social Studies Curriculum/NYS Framework for Social Studies

Of the ten unifying social studies themes identified within the NYSED Social Studies Standards and Curriculum Guide, there are two that reference culture:

- Individual Development and Cultural Identity.
- Development, Movement, and Interaction of Cultures.

These themes reinforce culture as essential to the study of social studies and history. They include learning about aspects of culture, such as belief systems, religious faith, or political ideals as influences on other parts of a culture.¹ Only through the study of culture can students come to understand the beliefs, values, institutions, behaviors, traditions, and way of life of a group of people. Most importantly, in a multicultural, democratic society and an increasingly interconnected

world, students are served well if they understand the multiple perspectives and complexities of cultural systems.

All students are enriched by studying culture. Young learners can explore cultural groups through social studies as they interact with class members and discover culturally based likenesses and differences. They can identify the celebrations and ways of life in their community and in examples from across the world. In the later grades, students can explore the nature and development of various cultures and cultural identity throughout history.

Teaching about Religion and Culture in Public School



The First Amendment protects students' rights to practice religion. In following the First Amendment, schools should be "neutral among religions" and should not "restrict religious freedom".² Therefore, when teaching about religion and religious practices in school, teachers should be careful not to denigrate

¹ New York State K-12 Social Studies Framework (November 2014) <http://www.engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-k-12-social-studies-framework>.

² C. Whittaker, S. J. Salend, and H. Elhoweris, "Religious diversity in schools: Addressing the issues." *Intervention in School and Clinic*, (2009) 44(5), 314-319.

a particular religion or promote another faith. It is important to present lessons about cultural practices and religious traditions that are supported by factual information, are free from bias, and demonstrate understanding and inclusiveness. It is equally important to incorporate lessons about all faiths, particularly those represented by the students taught in New York City schools. Children's book author Fawzia Gilani-Williams cautions, "By leaving out some children's heritage while others are

visible presents youngsters with an image of being undervalued or unimportant."³ Also, while comparison can be a useful strategy to develop understanding about diverse faiths, teachers should avoid presenting simple equivalencies and stereotypes.

Teachers should present holidays and other religious practices to students in sensitive and developmentally appropriate ways.



³ Fawzia Gilani-Williams, "Say the Word Again? Eid." *School Library Journal*, December 1, 2007. http://www.slj.com/2007/12/opinion/say-the-word-again-eid-up-for-discussion/#_

Teacher Background



Diwali: Festival of Lights

Diwali is known as the Festival of Lights. While the holiday of Diwali originated in India, it is celebrated around the world today. People who celebrate Diwali live on every continent and in significant numbers throughout South Asia, the Caribbean, the UK, and the United States. “Diwali” is derived from the root word *Deepavali* and means “row of lights.” While the reasons for celebrating are different for each, Diwali is a holiday for Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists. The date of Diwali falls either in October or November of each year, depending on the cycle of the moon. Diwali traditions are as varied as the people and places that celebrate it, and while traditions vary from region to region, some common rituals of the autumn holiday include cleaning and preparing the home prior to Diwali night. Celebrants then dress up in their finest clothing and celebrate with fireworks, feasts, and exchanging of gifts with close friends and family. An editorial from the *Times of India* provides a clear depiction of the celebration: “. . .what the festival of lights really stands for today is a reaffirmation of hope, a renewed commitment to friendship and goodwill, and a religiously sanctioned celebration of the simple—and some not so simple—joys of life.”⁴

Hindus



In Hinduism, Diwali celebrates the legend of the return of the Hindu god Rama to his kingdom after 14 years in exile. People line the streets with candles to show the way to his palace and paint rangoli patterns with colored powders outside their homes as a sign of welcome. Additionally, Lakshmi, goddess of wealth, is believed to enter homes during this period. The festival runs for five days, beginning with Dhanteras, although the main celebrations happen on the third day.

Jains



For Jains, Diwali marks the anniversary of the day that Mahavira, the twenty-fourth and last *Tirthankara*, or teacher, of the Jains gave his last teachings and attained liberation.

Sikhs



On the same day, Sikhs celebrate Bandi Chhor Diwas (Day of Liberation). In 1619, the sixth guru, Guru Hargobind Sahib, returned to the Golden Temple after he was released from prison and secured freedom for 52 Hindu princes. On this day, Sikhs celebrate and reflect on the ideals of religious freedom, justice, and service.

⁴ “Religions: Diwali.” *BBC*, October 20, 2010. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/holydays/diwali.shtml>.



Buddhists

People following the Buddhist religion celebrate Diwali because this is the day when Emperor Ashoka converted to Buddhism. Buddhists celebrate Diwali by chanting mantras and remembering Emperor Ashoka.



Diwali in America

In the United States, Diwali is celebrated in the homes of Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs as well as at many public festivals that provide celebrants with the opportunity to share their culture with the larger community.

In New York City, for example, Diwali festivals take place citywide, with large celebrations at the South Street Seaport, Times Square, and in Richmond Hill in Queens. The holiday is celebrated by New Yorkers of Indian, Bangladeshi, and Caribbean descent (primarily from Guyana and Trinidad).

In addition, many towns and states across the nation have recognized Diwali through

proclamations and local celebrations. The First Family has recognized and celebrated Diwali at the White House with the lighting of the White House *diya*, an oil lamp often used in religious festivals such as Diwali, and made a public address acknowledging the role of Indian culture in the ever-evolving fabric of America. Michelle Obama said, “We mean that we want to honor and embrace all of the many cultures and faith traditions that make us who we are as Americans. And Diwali is very much one of those traditions.”⁵

- **In 2015, Diwali is on November 11.**
- **In 2016, Diwali is on October 30.**
- **In 2017, Diwali is on October 19.**

⁵ “White House Diwali 2013: Michelle Obama Offers Remarks At White House Celebration,” *Huffington Post*, November 5, 2013. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/05/white-house-diwali-2013-michelle-obama_n_4214811.html

Sample Lessons and Suggested Activities

The following lessons and activities offer opportunities to recognize and celebrate Diwali with students. The lessons can be modified to meet the individual needs of students. In addition to lessons, there are other resources ranging from suggested books and websites to museum exhibits that allow for greater exploration of Diwali and Indian culture.



Vocabulary

Vocabulary is an essential component to understanding new areas of study. The vocabulary list below contains key words. Some suggestions for incorporating these words into instruction include:

- creating a visual glossary.
- completing an open sort of the words, in which students put related words together and create a title for their categories.
- searching slide shows and labeling examples of each new term.

Culture: the beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place, or time

Cultural diffusion: the spread of cultural beliefs, features, and social activities from one culture to another

Diwali: a holiday celebrated by Hindus, Jains, and Sikhs around the world. It is commonly referred to as the Festival of Lights and marks the beginning of the fiscal year for many in India

Diya: (also known as a divaa, deepa, deepam, or deepak) an oil lamp, usually made from clay, with a cotton wick dipped in ghee, or clarified butter

Festival: a day or time of celebration marked by feasting, ceremonies, or other observances

Lunar calendar: a calendar that is based on the different phases of the moon

Religion: an organized system of beliefs, ceremonies, rules, and practices

Rangoli: (also known as Kolam or Muggu) a folk art from India in which patterns are created on the floor in living rooms or courtyards, using materials such as colored rice, dry flour, colored sand, or flower petals. It is usually made during Diwali, Onam, Pongal, and other Indian festivals

Tradition: stories, beliefs, a way of doing things that is passed down from generation to generation



Sample Lesson: Religion and Traditions

Suggested Grades: K–2

Materials:

Book about Hinduism, images about Hinduism

Objective:

Students understand that Diwali is a celebration that started in India. They will learn that different religions have important traditions.

Invite students to think about the religions they and their friends celebrate. Teacher charts definitions of religion and tradition:

religion: an organized system of beliefs, ceremonies, rules, and practices

tradition: stories, beliefs, a way of doing things that is passed down from generation to generation

Ask students to share a family tradition. (This can be assigned for homework prior to this lesson.)



List some examples of the traditions that students share. Then, categorize the traditions. Possible categories include food, holidays, and religion.

Explain that people around the world have different religions and religions have traditions. One important world religion is Hinduism. Hindus have many gods. Hindus also have many sacred, or holy, books. One tradition of Hinduism is Diwali, a celebration of light over darkness, good over evil.

Read aloud a text about Hinduism. One example is found in the Grade 2 Core Knowledge Early Asian Civilizations Read-Aloud Anthology.⁵ Pair or group the students and ask them to sort images about Hinduism into categories. Teacher provides the pictures.

Students look at the pictures and decide if the picture represents a Hindu god, a Hindu celebration, or a Hindu sacred book. Each picture includes a fact about Hinduism.

Students can think-pair-share the first picture and identify the best category. After sorting, students share one thing they learned about Hinduism with a partner.

⁵ "Hindus and Hinduism," *Early Asian Civilizations Tell It Again! Read-Aloud Anthology*, Grade 2 Core Knowledge Language New York Edition, 2013. https://www.engageny.org/file/6151/download/ckla_g2_d2_anth.pdf



Many of Hinduism's holy books are in Sanskrit, which came from oral tradition.



Hindus celebrate Diwali by lighting diyas, or clay lamps.



Hindus read religious stories to guide daily life.



Diwali celebrations include food, festivity, and fireworks.



Hindus call Brahma the creator of the universe.



Hindus call Shiva the destroyer of evil.



Lakshmi is the goddess of good fortune and wealth, fortune, and prosperity.



Hindus call Vishnu the preserver or the protector.



Sample Lesson: Symbols

Suggested Grades: K–5

Materials:

Diwali text, symbol images, student copies of *Image Protocol*.

Diwali song from: <http://www.nancymusic.com/SOM/2011/diwali.htm>

Texts on Diwali:

- <http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/kids/stories/peopleplaces/diwali/>
- Grade 2 Core Knowledge Early Asian Civilizations Read-Aloud Anthology.⁵

Rangoli designs from:

<http://www.activityvillage.co.uk/rangoli-colouring-pages>

Objective:

Students learn about Diwali by analyzing symbols using the *Image Protocol*.

Display a symbol that most students will recognize. Possible ideas include a stop sign, the American flag, or the Nike symbol. Ask students to identify the symbols.

Explain that a symbol represents something, such as an idea, person, or object.

Ask students to participate in a think-pair-share, answering the question: *Why are symbols used?*

Chart student responses and let students name other symbols they know.

Explain that symbols play an important role in religions and celebrations. Explain that students will look at symbols relating to the holiday Diwali.

Younger students:

Play the Diwali song. Explain what the song is and when it is played. Ask the students to follow the hand motions and sing along.

Intermediate grade students:

Either read to them aloud or students can independently read a text on Diwali, the Festival of Lights.

For all students, ask them to identify symbols of Diwali in the song or reading selection. Intermediate grade students should also identify the diya and the rangoli in the text.

Show the students a rangoli image. Explain that the rangoli, a symbol of Diwali, is art that is meant as a sign of welcome, both for guests and the goddess Lakshmi.

Model how to analyze the rangoli image using the *Image Protocol* that follows. Ask the students why the rangoli would make them feel welcomed.

Ask students to work with a partner to analyze a second photograph, a diya. Additional images and rows can be added to the chart for intermediate grade students. Students share their analyses.

Students can then either design a rangoli or color a rangoli design that is meant as a sign of welcome.

Conclude the lesson by having students use evidence from the reading and one of the images to explain one symbol of Diwali.

⁵ "Diwali," *Early Asian Civilizations Tell It Again! Read-Aloud Anthology*, Grade 2 Core Knowledge Language New York Edition, 2013.

Rangoli



Diya



	I See...	This Makes Me Think...
Image 1		
Image 1		



Sample Lesson: Religion and Traditions

Suggested Grades: 3–6

Materials:

Student text excerpts from:
http://www.uri.org/kids/world_hind_basi.htm

Student copies of *Religion Characteristics Chart*

Objective:

Students read a text and organize information about religions and traditions into a chart.

Elicit a definition of religion from the students.

Chart a list of characteristics a religion may have. Model using the *Religion Characteristics Chart*.

Distribute *Religion Characteristics Chart* to students and explain that the chart contains a blank row where students can add their own category.

Provide students with a text about Hinduism, such as *Hinduism: Background, Basic Beliefs and Sacred Texts*.

Explain that students will read about Hinduism to identify characteristics of the Hindu religion.

Model how to skim the text for specific headers or key words that can help locate information about Hindu gods.

Students read the selected text in order to complete their charts.

Additional texts can be provided.

Conclude the lesson by asking students to share the most interesting fact they learned about Hinduism and one question they still have.

Traditional Indian earthen lamp during Diwali





Religion Characteristics Chart

Religions have many characteristics. Some are similar to other religions and some are different. Use this chart to help you identify the characteristics of Hinduism.

Concept of God(s)	
Sacred Books	
Important Beliefs	
Important Places	
Followers	

One thing I have learned about Hinduism is _____
_____.

One question I still have is _____
_____.



Sample Lesson: Diwali Around the World

Suggested Grades: 3–8

Materials:

Mapmaker feature of major world religions:
<http://mapmaker.education.nationalgeographic.com>

Images of President and First Lady Michelle Obama attending Diwali celebrations:

- https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Michelle_Obama_dances_with_students_of_Holy_Name_High_School,_Mumbai,_2010.jpg
- <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/obama-to-attend-diwali-reception-at-white-house/article2576147.ece>

World Outline Map

Objective:

Students use maps to understand Hinduism and its traditions and how it has spread to many places around the world.

Display a political map of the world.

Elicit from the students that a map key provides important information.

Demonstrate that a political map key shows capitals, cities, and boundaries.

Explain that maps can show other information, such as major religions of the world.

A map of major religions can be generated at National Geographic Education Mapmaker Interactive. Find the major religions category when the Culture layer link is clicked (Add Layer/Culture/Major Religions).

Explain to students that maps of world religions show what religions are most practiced in the world.

Show students the map legend key and that red represents Hinduism.

Ask students to read the map to find the country where Hinduism is most practiced.

Explain to students that Hindus have immigrated to different parts of the world and that they bring their culture and traditions with them. Immigrants share their culture with their new country.

For older students, introduce the concept of *cultural diffusion*. Parts of immigrants' culture are often changed because of the influences of their new country. At the same time, immigrants influence the culture of the place where they have moved.

Show students images of President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama attending a Diwali candle lighting and performance at a school in Mumbai, India.

Explain that President Obama is not Hindu. Ask students to generate a list of three reasons why the president of the United States would attend a Diwali celebration in India and one at the White House. Ask older students to identify examples or evidence of cultural diffusion that appears in the image.

Provide students with an outline map of the world.

Guide younger students in creating a key with the title, *Places that Have Diwali Celebrations*. Students should choose a color and make a square around the title.

Guide students to label and color India and the United States. Students then explore other places around the world where Diwali is celebrated and add them to their maps. Remind students about the connection to cultural diffusion.

Younger students:

Compare and contrast an image of a Diwali celebration from India with an image of a Diwali celebration from another country.

Older students:

Complete a *Frayer Model* for cultural diffusion, using examples from the images and text. Model with an example from an image.



Frayer Model: Cultural Diffusion

Define	In your own words
Non-examples	Examples

Conclude the lesson by asking students to think about the following questions and discuss them with a partner:

- What are the benefits of cultures sharing their holidays?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of cultural diffusion?



Sample Lesson: Images of Diwali

Suggested Grades: 6–8; can also be adapted for Grades 9–12

Materials:

Images from Diwali

Image Analysis Protocol

Objective:

Students develop a deeper appreciation of the cultures that celebrate Diwali by analyzing photographs.

Provide students with images of Diwali. Explain that they will select and analyze several images to better understand the festival traditions of Diwali. Model the *Image Analysis Protocol* for the students using one of the images about Diwali.

The *Image Analysis Protocol* that follows is designed to support students in a close read and deep analysis of an image or sets of images.

It focuses students' thinking around an image with a targeted strategy rather than allowing students to make quick, snap judgments about the meaning of an image.

The protocol does not have time stipulations, but providing a clear expectation of a time limit for each section is suggested. The last step provides students with the opportunity to make connections to historical content. At any step on the protocol, pause the process to build discussion about the images and the meanings that emerge.

Differentiate for students by providing additional text analysis strategies, such as breaking the image into parts/quadrants and analyzing in a targeted order or providing categories of analysis.

After students have analyzed a number of images, ask students to discuss the key characteristics that are represented in the images. Ask students to share what they learned about Diwali and Indian culture from analyzing the images and from their discussions.





Image Analysis Protocol

Step 1: Objects

What objects do you see in the image?

Write down any objects you see, even if they don't seem important.

Step 2: Big Ideas, Emotions, Trends, “-isms,” and Themes

What big ideas, emotions, or trends do you notice?

What big ideas are found in the image? What inferences can you make about the subject of the image about what the people are feeling, what they are doing, and why they are doing it?

Steps 3, 4 & 5: Analysis

Step 3: Circle the most important objects (from Step 1). Circle the most important emotions (from Step 2). Identify the most important elements of the image.

Step 4: Based on analysis from Step 3, what is the main idea or meaning of the image?

Step 5: What connections can you make between what you see in the image and what you learned about history? Explain how and why the image shows the main idea and explains the time period, event, individual, concept, theme, or lens.



Sample Lesson: Unity Among Cultures

Suggested Grades: 9–12

Materials:

Gandhi and South Africa:

<http://www.npr.org/2014/04/16/303363995/before-india-a-young-gandhi-found-his-calling-in-south-africa>

Mandela biography:

http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1993/mandela-bio.html

Gandhi's speech:

<https://gandhipriyan.wordpress.com/2012/11/09/mahatma-gandhis-diwali-speech/>

Mandela's speech:

<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=4173>

Objective:

Through the reading and analysis of primary source documents, students identify common characteristics across two cultures (Indian and South African cultures) and analyze how Diwali is an example of how unity was developed between the two cultures.

Provide students with context about Mahatma Gandhi's speech on Diwali. If needed, teachers provide students with a short biography on Mahatma Gandhi.

Students read Mahatma Gandhi's speech searching for evidence to help them define Diwali and identify key principles, beliefs, or values of Indian culture (according to Gandhi).

Students work in groups to share their evidence and define Diwali. Chart the definition and

list the key principles, beliefs, or values as students share. Provide additional instruction or background information to the chart as needed.

Provide students with the background information that Mahatma Gandhi actually began his career in South Africa. Nelson Mandela, a prominent leader and figure in South African history, was influenced by Gandhi's work and beliefs. Provide additional information about Nelson Mandela if necessary.

Students read the speech Nelson Mandela delivered at the Diwali Celebration held at Durban City Hall in 1991. As they read, students annotate places where Mandela makes references to any of the principles about Diwali and Indian culture that the class identified from Gandhi's speech.

Students engage in a discussion on the following:

- Citing evidence from the two speeches, what are the common characteristics across these two cultures?
- Can Diwali be considered a unifying force for the people in South Africa? Why or why not?
- How do the principles of Diwali represent the struggles that both Mandela and Gandhi fought for?

The lesson closes with students answering the following question:

- What other examples from history exemplify this type of cross-cultural unifying force?

Resources



Museums and Organizations

Asian Art collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

<http://www.metmuseum.org/en/about-the-museum/museum-departments/curatorial-departments/asian-art>

<http://www.metmuseum.org/en/events/programs/multicultural/2013/diwali>

Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller Collection at the Asia Society

<http://www.asiasocietymuseum.org/>

Rubin Museum of Art

<http://rubinmuseum.org>

Hall of Asian Peoples American Museum of Natural History

<http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/permanent-exhibitions/human-origins-and-cultural-halls/gardner-d.-stout-hall-of-asian-peoples>



Books

Elementary School

Celebrate Diwali: With Sweets, Lights and Fireworks

by Deborah Heiligman

National Geographic Publishers, 2008

ISBN: 978-1426302916

Diwali

by Christine Mia Gardeski

Scholastic Library Publishing, 2001

ISBN: 978-0-5162-2372-8

Finders Keepers: A True Story in India

by Robert Arnett

Atman Press, 2013

ISBN: 978-0-9652-9008-1

Lighting a Lamp: A Diwali Story

by Janny Zucker

Barron's Educational Series, 2004

ISBN: 978-0-7641-2670-3

Ravi's Diwali Surprise

by Anisha Kacker

Modern Curriculum, 1994

ISBN: 978-0-8136-2333-7

Elementary/Middle School

The Lights of Diwali

by Carol M. Hansen

Friesen Press 2014

ISBN ID: 2940150387072

Middle School

Krishna and Narakasura

by Anant Pai Amar Chitra Katha 2006

ISBN-13: 978-8175080720

High School

Folktales from India

by A.K. Ramanujan

Penguin 2009

ISBN-13: 978-0143066439



Websites with Lessons and Activities for Diwali

Elementary School

Let's Celebrate Diwali!

www.scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plan/lets-celebrate-diwali

Diwali Footprints

www.crayola.com/lesson-plans/diwali-footprints-lesson-plan/

Diwali Song

<http://www.nancymusic.com/SOM/2011/diwali.htm>

Rangoli Coloring Pages

<http://www.activityvillage.co.uk/rangoli-colouring-pages>

Diwali, India's Festival of Light

<http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/kids/stories/peopleplaces/diwali/>

Middle School

Celebrating Light and Liberation, Sikh Style

www.huffingtonpost.com/sonny-singh/the-celebration-of-light_b_6078594.html

Jain Holy Days

<http://www.bbc.uk/religion/religions/jainism/holydays/holydays.shtml#h3>

United Religions Initiative: Hinduism

http://www.uri.org/kids/world_hind_basi.htm

High School

Video

<http://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/27735a97-eb78-4c11-a281-a184bead96fc/diwali-religion-and-ethics-weekly/>

Lessons on India

<http://www.pbs.org/thestoryofindia/teachers/lessons/1/>

Additional

Bandi Chhor Divas: Sikh Perspective on Diwali

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/immy-kaur/bandi-chhor-divas-sikh-diwali_b_2120015.html

Bandi Chhor Divas

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bandi_Chhor_Divas

Diwali, The Festival of Lights

www.diwalfestival.org

Hinduism

<http://resources.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/homework/religion/hinduism.htm#text>

Diwali in the Big Apple

<http://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/10/27/diwali-in-the-big-apple/>

National Geographic Education MapMaker Interactive

http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/mapping/interactive-map/?ar_a=1

Hindu American Foundation

<http://www.hafsite.org/hinduism-101/hinduism-101-teachers-resource-teaching-about-hinduism>

Diwali Toolkit

<http://www.hafsite.org/media/pr/diwali-toolkit>

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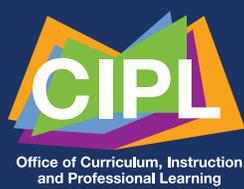
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